

**“Our Jane” and *Gītā-yoga*:  
Non-Gender Exclusiveness of the *Bhagavad-Gītā***

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ABSTRACT

Suppose that the protagonist of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* had been a woman. Would Kṛṣṇa’s message to her have been the same as it was to the morally tormented warrior Arjuna? Could it have been, without violating the essential intentions of this work? Consider the historical case of Lakṣmibai, the Rani of Jhansi, a rare and legendary female warrior who lived, fought and died in nineteenth-century Colonial India. For the sake of argument, one could imagine her in Arjuna’s place and ask: what if she had experienced Arjuna’s moment of moral doubt (and spiritual need) before taking to the battlefield? Would the answers for her be the same as they were for Arjuna? Or to put it another way: is there a gender-exclusiveness in the message of the *Gītā*?

Upon close examination, this does not appear to be the case. The three-fold discipline described by Kṛṣṇa, or “*Gītā-yoga*,” to borrow a phrase from Bina Gupta, is multi-faceted precisely because human beings are different from each other as individuals; yet it is capable of being articulated as a universalizable discipline because human beings are fundamentally the same with respect to their humanity and mortality, irrespective of gender, occupation or circumstances. Anyone can pursue *Gītā-yoga* in order to act morally and realize spiritual satisfaction, albeit the particulars of that pursuit are expected to vary according to individual capacity, character and disposition. The *Gītā* does not at any point, however, draw distinctions between the duties, virtues or spiritual capacities of persons on the basis of gender. Lakṣmibai serves as an excellent example of a woman who could potentially realize all three aspects of *Gītā-yoga*, further belying any temptation to interpret Kṛṣṇa’s message as surreptitiously gender-exclusive and thus strengthening a case for its applicability as a moral philosophy for a contemporary world.